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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 002654

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [PTER](#) [KIRF](#) [IZ](#) [EG](#)  
SUBJECT: EGYPT'S MUFTI ON U.S. VISIT, IRAQ, REFORMING  
JIHADISTS

REF: CAIRO 1638

Classified By: Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone, for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a 90-minute meeting on August 26, the Ambassador and the Mufti of the Republic, Dr. Ali Goma'a, discussed the Mufti's possible travel to the U.S. and Canada in December, and a mid-August meeting in Cairo of Iraqi Sunni and Shi'a leaders with Egyptian Muslim leaders, orchestrated in part by Canon Andrew White. Goma'a also spoke in detail about his efforts with the Ministry of Interior to influence the Islamic Jihad's imprisoned leaders to renounce violence. End summary.

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POSSIBLE DECEMBER VISIT TO THE U.S.  
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¶2. (C) The Mufti noted that he plans to travel to Canada in late December, and that the Egyptian Embassy in Washington had approached him about also visiting the U.S. in that timeframe. The Ambassador encouraged him to visit, and offered to coordinate with the Egyptian MFA regarding arranging meetings, as desired, with USG officials. (Note: During a June visit to London, Goma'a met with then UK PM Tony Blair and current PM Gordon Brown at a Cambridge University-sponsored interfaith dialogue conference. End note). Goma'a commented that he has been a frequent visitor to the U.S. since his first trip in 1981, but that he last traveled to the U.S. in 1999, and had not returned since due in part to his concerns about "invasive security procedures and inspections" since September 11. Noting this his daughter lives in North Carolina and that his two grandchildren are American citizens, Goma'a expressed his desire that his office develop a stronger relationship with the U.S. writ large, and with American religious institutions in particular - "we have strong ties with the UK and France, but not with America, and so we would like to found a real, meaningful relationship and dialogue with you." The Ambassador welcomed this sentiment, and gave the Mufti the text of President Bush's June 27 speech at the Islamic Center of Washington, and President Eisenhower's June 1957 speech at the same venue. He also presented our new Library of Congress (LOC) representative, Dr. Fawzi Tadros, who invited the Mufti to participate as a speaker in the LOC's Middle East seminar program in Washington. The Mufti expressed eagerness to cooperate with the LOC.

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RENUNCIATIONS OF THE JIHAD GROUP:  
"A SINGULAR OCCURRENCE"  
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¶3. (C) When queried as to his thoughts on the recent doctrinal revisions of the Islamic Jihad (IJ) (reftel), in which the group's leaders called for a halt to all "combat

operations" and advocated a turn away from violence, the Mufti spoke at length regarding the struggle in Islam between extremists and moderates. He said that the renunciations of IJ were the result of a years-long process, that is a "step-by-step affair ... In my view, there are three stages in this evolution - (1) a criminal who advocates killing, (2) an extremist who condemns violence, but who still has many extreme and objectionable views and (3) a moderate Muslim." He lamented that the IJ doctrine "still includes many mistaken interpretations and radical positions that I do not condone - they remain extremists, but at least are no longer advocates of killing. Now they can move to the next stage, and become moderate Muslims." Goma'a noted that "we must ease the extremists back slowly into mainstream society and beliefs. We cannot imprison an entire society, so must work to impact the minds of Egyptians, showing them that extremism and killing is not the right path." He observed that thousands of former members of IJ and the Islamic Group (aka Gamaat Islamiyaa) had condemned violence in recent years, reflected in the fact that after Sadat's assassination, 16,000 extremists were in prison, but currently "less than 1,000 are in prison."

14. (C) The Mufti stressed that the IJ's doctrinal changes "came from within the group itself, they were not imposed," but also noted that the "entire project was overseen by the Ministry of Interior." Goma'a noted that, both prior to his becoming Mufti in 2003 (when he was an Al Azhar professor of Islamic jurisprudence) and after his appointment, he had quietly met several times with some of the IJ leaders. He had provided them carefully selected books to influence their thinking (he promised to send us the approximately 17 specific titles). The Mufti also engaged the IJ leaders by reviewing the drafts of their statement renouncing violence,

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and "changed a word or two here and there, in an effort to make it less extreme." Goma'a opined that the IJ's metamorphosis was "a unique experience that is unlikely to be repeated with other extremist groups ... there was a singular set of circumstances surrounding this lengthy process. Some key IJ thinkers died, others grew older and thus became less radical. Family relationships also were a factor in each case. Overall, there were chinks in the group that were exploited to result in this philosophical step back from violence ... I am doubtful that exactly the same process can be repeated with other extremist groups."

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IRAQ IS A BLOODBATH; WE WANT TO HELP  
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15. (C) Regarding the recent meeting in Cairo of Iraqi Sunni and Shi'a leaders with Egyptian Muslim leaders, orchestrated in part by Canon Andrew White, the Mufti said he welcomed the initiative, and had told the Embassy of Iraq in Cairo "long ago" that he "would be happy to assist in any way possible with inter-sect dialogue," although, "now, we are very late in the game." Goma'a noted that such efforts were "one step towards a solution," and that, "in my office, we have been brainstorming ways in which we can assist Iraqis ... it is a tragic situation, and we want to help." (Note: Egyptian media reported on Goma'a's exhortation to the Iraqi visitors to "next time include their Christian brothers." End note). The Mufti criticized the U.S. decision to invade Iraq, and lamented that "the U.S. did not listen to the advice of your Egyptian friends in 2003," but commented that he did not think an American withdrawal under current circumstances would demonstrably improve the situation. "If you stay, there will be a bloodbath. And if you leave, there will be a bloodbath. It is a terrible quandary."

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DEMOCRACY, AND COUNTERING UBL  
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¶16. (C) Noting that he is a "believer in democracy," the Mufti said, "I consider the core of democracy as the right of people to express themselves freely, and to enjoy a variety of freedoms in their lives. I support this." Goma'a also spoke of his personal efforts to promote moderate Islam, and the challenges of "keeping children from watching Usama bin Laden on TV, and seeing him as a strong, heroic leader who they want to emulate," and criticized Arab satellite TV stations for broadcasting UBL's videotapes and thereby giving him a platform. The Ambassador queried the Mufti regarding his July 21 statements, posted on a Newsweek-Washington Post internet forum, which included a controversial comment that there is no "worldly punishment" for conversion away from Islam. The Mufti, clearly not anxious to get into the issue, was unresponsive on this point.

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